

THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

have a weakness for textiles, salt, and empty bottles. At best this labour is seasonal and nomadic.

Of all Asiatic labourers the Chinese are by far the most satisfactory, as is shown by the high prices paid to them, and to the agents who procure their labour. The Chinese are inexhaustible numerically and physically; they have no need to adjust themselves to the Indo-Chinese climate, they are industrious and sober, with an amazing adaptability to either farming or commerce. The drawbacks to their labour are the higher price they demand: their transiency in the colony; their tendency to leave farming for commerce, except in Cambodia; and their close-knit political organization that makes them feared by French and Annamites alike.

In 1928 a census of foreign labourers in Indo-China showed that a vast majority of twelve thousand were Chinese, and that the remaining few were principally Javanese. An article comparing Javanese labour favourably to the Chinese,¹ had early awakened the Cochin-Chinese planters' interest. The Javanese were good and steady workers, though less robust than the Chinese. Their labour output was smaller, but they attached themselves more to the soil, were more easily disciplined, and totally without that commercial aptitude that made the Chinese a problem. The Dutch government naturally opposed their wholesale migration. In 1906 Indo-China contrived to get official consent to importing Javanese labour under certain conditions. The experiment proved highly successful: 45 per cent of the first group, and 85 per cent of the second, renewed their contracts. Good agents were partly responsible for the outcome, as well as the co-operation of the Dutch government in matters of transportation. The War, however,

changed the willingness of the Dutch to permit labourers to leave Java. The stricter conditions that were subsequently imposed, and for a more limited migration, made Javanese labour more expensive than Annamite. In addition, there were certain complications, notably in food preparation, which arose from the fact that many Javanese were Moslems.

The obstacles to transporting labourers from North Indo-China to the South were primarily psychological. The misery of the over-populated Tonkinese delta, the opportunities offered by the unoccupied, fertile lands of the South—all militated in favour of a large-scale emigration. In 1898 occurred the first unsuccessful attempt to said peasants from Annam to Cochinchina. At that time the government's public proj^mine had raised the price of labour and this helped to

¹ *Quinzaine Colomale*, 35 juillet, 1903.